Lightfoot mixes rock with ballads

By Michael St. John
Music writer

Review

This weekend, the Badgers won, the Brewers won, and the Packers won. With the spirit that swept Madison (the whole state, actually) on Saturday and Sunday afternoon having run its course, anything short of the Titanic sinking in Lake Mendota would seem anti-climactic.

Gordon Lightfoot's performance at the Civic Center on Sunday evening fit the mood of Madison perfectly. He, too, was tired.

Friday and Saturday shows in Minneapolis and Duluth preceded the Madison appearance. With recording sessions occupying most of Lightfoot's time recently, and considering that his touring schedule averages less than two dates per week, it's understandable that he and the band might feel some strain.

So there you have the mood. Sedate, mellow, maybe a little burnt.

But then, you don't expect rock and roll from Gordon Lightfoot.

Didn't.

There is change in the wind for the 42-year-old folk singer. At the Civic Center, Lightfoot and his band provided some previews of that change while attempting to keep things somewhat familiar. Opening with "Hey You" from the latest LP "Dream Street Rose," the honey-voiced Canadian swung into abbreviated versions of earlier works before offering a full-length "Hangdog Hotel."

Explaining that he had written several new songs since last July, Lightfoot briefly used a music stand to hold his notes for "Heaven Help The Devil," a composition inspired by the Iranian hostage situation. Its closing line, "Heaven help the devil, may he have a few unpleasant memories" is especially striking.

A highlight of the show's first half was "Whiz Kids" or "On My Honor" (we'll have to wait for the new album to know for sure) which deals with what Lightfoot called "my driving charges." The tune marks a unique use of rock phrasing in the lyric.

Lightfoot drew applause when he fumbled with the words to "If You Could Read My Mind," but you could have heard the proverbial pin drop throughout "Ghosts of Cape Horn." A new ballad, "Thank You For The Promises," and "Gotta Get Away,"easily Lightfoot's strongest rocker to date, led into "The Wreck Of The Edmund Fitzgerald" to finish the first half of the concert.

Part two showcased new tunes like "Triangle" (about the famed Bermuda area), the projected title track for the new album "Shadows," and an up-tempo autobiographical piece called "In My Fashion." In between were the crowd-pleasing "The Auctioneer," "Sundown" and the grandest of finales, "The Canadian Railroad Trilogy."

When you're a legend, it's OK to occasionally rest on your laurels.

Apparently, Gordon Lightfoot is about ready to take those laurels one step further.

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